

Testimony to the
Planning & Development Committee

made by

Brian H. Sear, Canterbury First Selectman

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Thank you for this opportunity to discuss the concept of regionalism and its benefits to our State. Today I am here to address the following bills:

- Proposed S.B. No. 496 AN ACT CONCERNING A MUNICIPAL TAX REVENUE SHARING SYSTEM.
- Proposed H.B. No. 5782 AN ACT CONCERNING THE HOTEL TAX.
- Proposed H.B. No. 6100 AN ACT CONCERNING REGIONAL PROPERTY TAX REVENUE SHARING.
- H.B. No. 5332 (COMM) AN ACT REQUIRING MUNICIPALITIES THAT REGIONALIZE TO PROVIDE PROPERTY TAX RELIEF.
- Proposed S.B. No. 495 AN ACT CONCERNING THE PROVISION OF SERVICES BY REGIONAL COUNCILS OF GOVERNMENT.
- Proposed S.B. No. 894 AN ACT CONCERNING THE CONSOLIDATION OF NON EDUCATIONAL SERVICES.
- Proposed H.B. No. 5928 AN ACT AUTHORIZING REGIONAL ASSETS INVESTMENTS.
- H.B. No. 6412 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE SMALL TOWN ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE PROGRAM.

"Regionalism" is being widely discussed as a solution to a host of perceived problems in our State. I think it's important to define this term before we figure out its usefulness, and prior to enacting legislation to promote or protect its use.

If by "regionalism" you mean Towns (or entities within Towns) working together to define and then implement sharing services to increase efficiencies and save taxpayer dollars, then this has been going on (and continues) for quite some time. First Selectmen and Town Managers are under extreme scrutiny in the preparation and implementation of their budgets. Canterbury's General government budget alone has 129 line items, each of which is proposed, confirmed and then tracked over the course of the fiscal year. This pressure and transparency is a key motivator for Towns to constantly find ways to get "more with less." In Canterbury's case this has resulted in us sharing (regionalizing) with other Towns the following: Animal Control, Building Inspector, Fire Marshall, Engineering, Property Revaluation, and even catch basin cleaning. Some of this is done on a town to town basis and others through our council of governments. We are currently researching other areas of possible sharing. I'm constantly in touch with other Selectmen in the area to discuss possible sharing opportunities.

Does this mean all Town services should be shared? And with whom? What is the point at which "regionalizing" becomes harmful, more costly and inefficient? What is the ideal "span of control" of shared services?

My own personal litmus test is that services that do not define the character of an individual Town lend themselves best to "regionalizing", while those that are unique should be kept within the smallest entity. Those services listed above have saved taxpayer money and increased efficiency without detracting from our Town's identity. I believe others services such as senior services, recreation, zoning and assessment could have a detrimental effect on the Town. Ongoing discussion of this question is extremely fruitful.

I hope that you will include direct experience from Town leaders in achieving a consensus of what is meant when we use the term "regionalism", and consider the fact that many of those initiatives that seem new are actually presently in place and don't need to be re-invented, just encouraged. With all due respect, I tend to think the Towns know best what is best to regionalize at a given time, and with whom.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment. I would be pleased to address any questions committee members may have on this subject.